

CDFA Farm Bill Listening Session
August 1, 2006
Sacramento, CA

**Research & Extension Priorities Identified by Specialty Crop Research Team
Comments by Robert Curtis**

I am Bob Curtis and I manage the production research program funded by the Almond Board of California. However, today I am speaking on behalf of the Specialty Crop Research Team, or the SCRT.

The SCRT is a broad and growing coalition of national and California crop organizations providing a unified voice articulating the common research and extension needs of Specialty Crop Team Members. The focus of our coalition is fruit and nut crops. California members currently include the California Tree Fruit Agreement, the California Citrus Research Board, the California Dried Plum Board, the Almond Board of California, the California Walnut Commission, the American Vineyard Foundation, the California Association of Winegrape Growers, the California Specialty Crops Council, the California Pistachio Commission and the California Kiwifruit Commission. You can expect our numbers to grow as we are enlisting more support.

In June, the SCRT coalition completed a position paper which I will post this on the website for your reference and study as you develop the California perspective on the 2007 Farm Bill. In this we have created a unifying list of research and extension needs that outline common strategic priorities for specialty crops in four key areas of research, extension and education. These are:

- Understanding and Improving Quality
- Understanding Consumer Perceptions of Specialty Crops, the Role of Nutrition in Specialty Crops, and the Economic Contribution of Specialty Crops to Rural Economies
- Enhancing Processing and Production Efficiency
- Developing and Promoting Sustainable Practices

The paper provides the context and more information on each of these. As you might expect, different specialty crop industries weighted the priorities differently. However, no effort was made to rank the priorities other than to note that they are all important. Their ranking is interchangeable as needed to suit the industry. The important point is there is a consensus opinion on common and important research and extension needs.

The SCRT is also unified in saying extension and outreach is an overarching need, as also covered in the position paper. Research directed at each of the four critical need areas identified above will contribute significantly to the growth and success of the U.S. and California specialty crop sector in both the domestic and global marketplaces. However, those research results must be delivered to, and implemented by, producers and processors via world-class extension and outreach. Unfortunately, the specialty crop industry nationwide and in California continues to see university-based Cooperative Extension eroding. Unprecedented private-public partnerships have maintained basic outreach and extension here and there, but these piecemeal measures are inadequate. A growing specialty crop industry must secure and strengthen extension and outreach, particularly in light of numerous issues like global competition, environmental stewardship and sustainability, pest pressures – including exotic pests, labor, increasing regulation, and food safety.

The position paper includes a list of California individuals who helped draft it. Please feel free to contact them or the other members I have mentioned for further information. Thank you.

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